

**Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety**  
**Monday, June 10, 2019 at 3:00 PM**  
**Room 643 of the Legislative Office Building**

**MINUTES**

The Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety met at 3:00 PM on June 10, 2019 in Room 643 of the Legislative Office Building. Members present were Senators Bob Steinburg, Harper Peterson, Norman Sanderson, Terry Van Duyn, Joyce Waddell, Tom McInnis, Kathy Harrington, Danny Britt,

Senator Steinburg, while presiding, welcomed and thanked Eddie Broughton, Tom Burroughs, Dwight Green, and Linda Matthews from the Senate Sergeant at Arms office.

Senator McInnis moved the minutes from May 13th, 2019 be approved as written. Senator Britt seconded the motion, and the motion carried.

Senator Steinburg called on Mr. Sean Ingram, author of *“From Poverty to Prison to Prosperity,”* to share his story. His presentation can be found on the committee website.

Senator Waddell asked Mr. Ingram what his basic philosophy was to reduce recidivism. Mr. Ingram stated that through having reform programs, resources, and counseling there can be a positive impact upon one’s mindset and the opportunity to succeed.

Senator Waddell followed up by asking how early we should talk to the students in schools about mindsets. Mr. Ingram stated that we should talk about mindsets in stages beginning in the early grades of elementary school.

Senator McInnis asked Mr. Ingram what pushed him over the edge that caused him to go to prison. Mr. Ingram stated that environment played a factor, stating that having an absentee father and being in poverty was all that he knew. No one ever pushed his intellectual side, but those in his environment always pushed athletics instead. Another factor was feeling like a burden to his grandmother and felt that all concerned would be better off if he was in prison or dead.

Senator McInnis followed up by asking for thoughts about how to keep people from entering the prison system to start with. Mr. Ingram replied by stating the problem is that, for example, gangs consisting of nothing but kids. What they need is someone who can be seen as the example of a role model and is someone who they can relate to and respect, so that they can be provided with a different and positive path. Assisting nonprofit, private organizations through funding and resources to influence these individuals to lead better lives by utilizing such role models would certainly help to make a lasting impact.

Senator Steinburg then opened the floor to discussion on the Senate Select Committee on Prison Safety Report to the 2019 Regular Session of the 2019 General Assembly of North Carolina.

The first item was the establishment of two separate departments from DPS entitled the Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice. Senator Peterson asked why the Department of Corrections and Juvenile Justice could not come out of DPS together as one department. Senator Steinburg replied that according to previous meetings and presentations, the overall consensus of the Committee was to recommend the creation of two separate departments.

The second item was increasing the death benefit for corrections officers and other officers killed in the line of duty. Senator Peterson asked whether such an increase in the death benefit would apply to other public safety officials as well. Senator Steinburg replied that yes, such a proposed increase to the death benefit would apply to any Law Enforcement Officer within the state system killed in the line of duty.

The third item was filling vacancies and encourage retention within DPS. Senator Steinburg pointed out that a number of those item are in the Senate budget. Senator Waddell asked about the educational assistance, including free tuition in the Community College system, and why four year institutions were not included. Senator Steinburg responded that the idea of providing a four year degree had been discussed by the Committee, however the majority consensus of the Committee was to take a baby step in proposing the two year system as a starting point and to see what the response rate was from Correctional Officers. Senator Waddell stated that she asked because there are some departments across from state government the offer tuition reimbursements for four year college tuition.

Senator Peterson asked about obtaining the behavioral health of applicants within the interview process for Correctional Officers and whether that would be handled internally or by an outside agency, and such a job description should be outlined given the relationship dynamic between inmate and Correctional Officer.

Senator Steinburg then brought up item number four, which is shift variations. Senator Peterson stated that he did not see the benefits of working long shifts in such a stressful, dangerous environment. Senator Steinburg responded that the Committee had recommended that DPS explore the use of eight hour shifts within correctional facilities.

Senator McInnis stated that he believed that a change should be made based upon a tallied vote by the DPS employees who would be most affected by such a variation in shift hours, giving them a voice in this process.

Senator Van Duyn stated that she believed that forced overtime was far worse than twelve hour shifts, and she believed that Correctional Officers should have a voice.

Senator Britt stated that a survey had been sent out to DPS employees and the previously mentioned concern was included in that survey and thus that question had been answered. Mr. Lasseter, Director of Prisons, stated that he was not sure whether that survey had been completed at that time, however he will be looking into the stage of the process it is in and would report back to the Committee on what the survey results were.

Senator Steinburg presented item number five, recommending that the Department of Public Safety explore ways to improve the availability and accessibility of mental health services for correction employees.

Item number six pertains to training for new and existing employees, the Committee recommends that DPS continue to strengthen and expand the training required by both new and existing employees.

Item number seven pertains to reinstate the examination process for promotion, the Committee is recommending that the examination for promotion be reinstated.

Item number eight, the Committee recommends that DPS develop further methods of providing better health care for inmates, including improving mental health screenings and reducing the use of solitary confinement.

Senator Steinburg asked for a motion of approval of the report. Senator Britt moved that the report be approved along with corrections that the counsel from Legislative Analysis deems necessary. Senator Waddell seconded the motion. During discussion, Senator Peterson stated that his opinion that Juvenile Justice and Corrections should be held together. The motion carried without opposition.

The meeting adjourned at 4:12 p.m.

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Select or Type Name of Presiding Chair  
Presiding

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Edward Stiles, Committee Clerk